

# HOUSTON CHRONICLE

FOUNDED 1901 • A HEARST NEWSPAPER

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## EDITORIAL

# At last

### A plan to test those 6,600 rape kits.

Earlier this month, when Mayor Annise Parker announced that Houston's backlog of more than 6,600 rape kits would at long last be tested within the next 14 months ("City plans to erase rape kit backlog," Feb. 14, A1), we felt mixed emotions: relief that finally, there's a real-time plan to get that DNA examined and astonishment that it's taken this long to arrive at that plan.

Some of those untested kits are believed to date back as far as 1988.

We repeat: 1988. Ronald Reagan was in office.

**Those languishing rape kits — part of the even larger scandal of the city's appalling crime lab — came to light in 2002.**

Michael Jackson was burning up the Billboard charts.

Mobile phones were the size of shoeboxes.

Those languishing rape kits — part of the even larger scandal of the city's appalling crime lab — came to light in 2002.

We repeat: 2002.

George W. Bush, laying groundwork for a war with Iraq, decried the "axis of evil."

Ken Lay resigned as CEO of Enron.

The iPod was new to the world, and the iTunes store had not yet been born.

How many crimes could have been solved if we'd tested those kits long ago?

How many rapes might have been prevented?

How many victims suffered the ordeal of having DNA collected from their bodies, only to have that evidence ignored?

We have no argument at all with the city's plan to spend \$4.4 million (half federal grants, half from the city budget) to have those kits tested by outside contractors.

And we're pleased that because of this decision, the city's reformulated independent crime lab — set to open later this year — won't be decades behind schedule on the first day that it opens its doors.

These tests needed to be done. We only wish that they'd been done sooner.



## LETTERS

### Federal funds

Regarding "Texas needs to expand its health care options" (Page B9, Friday), state Sen. Rodney Ellis and state Rep. Garnet Coleman are typical legislators who believe their purpose in life is to fix every injustice in the world through legislative action.

The Texas Constitution was supposed to restrain government. Today, nanny state programs have expanded it beyond our control.

The Affordable Care Act increases federal spending at a time when \$40 out of every \$100 of spending is borrowed. The debt now represents

over 60 percent of our national gross domestic production for a year.

When will Democrats wake up and look at their bill for \$16 trillion of debt that must be paid? They have no intention of dealing with it but will pass it on to our children while blaming Republicans for not raising taxes. No matter how worthy Texas' poor are, there is no money in the federal treasury to pay for more public benefits.

Gov. Perry has finally drawn a line in the sand against expensive wealth redistribution by a government addicted to vote buying.

*Glen Risley, Houston*

### Not adding up

Regarding "Federal agents raid The Scooter Store" (Page B2, Thursday), I am again amazed at the deals cut with our federal government when one gets caught with the hand in the seemingly bottomless cookie jar.

The article stated that from 2009 to 2011, The Scooter Store overbilled Medicare from \$46.8 million to \$87.7 million. However, the company only had to repay \$19.5 million to the government.

I am a college graduate and I was able to subtract \$19.5 million from \$46.8 million and \$87.7 million. In essence, The Scooter Store gets away with an amount from \$27.3 million to \$68.2 million of our tax dollars. Man, did they get punished or what?

Perhaps The Scooter Store can provide the government inspectors one of those lighted magnifying glasses that give away "free" to those who call their 1-800 numbers, so that the inspectors can better look at the figures.

*Jose Rodriguez, Huntsville*

### Price too costly

Your editorial on "Parking progress" (Page B8, Friday) made my blood boil. The last paragraph: "There is a price for living in walkable, dynamic neighborhoods, and it includes folks parking in front of your house. That is a price inner loop Houstonians should be happy to pay." Really? I am lucky that my street in the Heights is far enough away from 6th Street, Washington and Yale that I don't face that price.

How do you define "dynamic?" The neat shops on 19th Street and a mixture of restaurants, book stores, art fairs, etc. are dynamic. The last thing any neighborhood wants are places where people just go to sit and drink. With that comes drunkenness, foul language, peeing next to cars or in the parking lot and damaged cars.

Sure we all want to see Houston have a good economy, but since all the building at Yale, Heights Boulevard and Studemont, our traffic has become a nightmare. As usual, all the builders cram every piece of property in one tight, crowded area.

The Heights was a wonderful community before all of the above took place; so, I have to disagree with your suggestion that I should be happy to pay this price.

*Patricia Kelter, Houston*

## BIBLE VERSE

And God said unto Moses, I Am That I Am: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you.

*Exodus 3:14*

# Close online sales tax loopholes

By Rex Solomon

On July 1, 2012, online retail giant Amazon.com began collecting and remitting state sales taxes in Texas. As a small-business owner and president of Houston Jewelry, I can say from experience that this was cause for celebration in the Texas retail community.

At last, we were given the opportunity to play on a level playing field against one of our primary competitors, who until July 1 had a major competitive advantage: Their products appeared cheaper because they didn't add sales tax to the final sale price.

But this work isn't complete. Amazon began collecting sales tax only because it struck a deal with the state. The so-called "online tax loophole" still applies to every other online-only retailer doing business in Texas, and they continue to hurt brick-and-mortar businesses across the state — and across the country.

Fortunately, a solution is on the horizon.

New "e-fairness" legislation to require online-only businesses to collect and remit state and local sales taxes has been introduced in both the U.S. Senate and U.S. House. This bipartisan bill, known as the Marketplace Fairness Act, has the support of the Texas small-business

community, as well as the retail community across the country.

It is imperative that the Texas congressional delegation support this bill and that Congress pass it so that it can become the law of the land as soon as possible.

**Online-only retailers doing business in Texas continue to hurt brick-and-mortar businesses across the state.**

The urgency of this issue is real. Small businesses are the economic backbone of this state and nation. They provide jobs, economic growth and civic support in the communities they serve. And right now, we are fighting with one hand tied behind our backs.

In retail, pricing is everything. If a customer perceives that an online store has a better price than my store (they don't, but appear to because there is no sales tax included in their total), then I am going to lose that customer.

Not only is this simply unfair — by allowing this, the govern-

ment is effectively promoting one type of retailer over another — it is extremely damaging to businesses, the economy and the communities in which we live and work.

People like me are unfairly losing customers to online rivals all over the country. Every time we do, we are less able to support jobs, spend money in our communities and support local charitable causes. The same goes for our employees who lose wages or jobs. This in turn impacts every other business in a community.

What does this mean? Higher unemployment, slowing growth, underfunded charities and state and local governments receiving less in revenue while more and more folks need assistance. It's not right, it's not fair, and it needs to stop. If we really want to get the economy going again and revive stagnant communities, Congress needs to pass the Marketplace Fairness Act to close the online sales tax loophole for good.

In the strongest possible terms, I urge our senators and representatives to support this measure and work for its passage as soon as possible.

*Solomon is the president of Houston Jewelry Inc., and a board member of the Texas Jewelers Association.*

# The miracle that's unfolding on guns



**E.J. Dionne Jr. says those who support thoroughly moderate and reasonable weapons measures never surrendered.**

WASHINGTON — A not-so-small miracle is unfolding before our eyes. After nearly two decades in which established opinion insisted that it would never again be possible to pass sensible regulations of firearms, the unthinkable is on the verge of happening.

This week, Sen. Patrick Leahy, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, is expected to announce plans to start marking up gun bills to send to the Senate floor, proposals that will include ideas put before the country by President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden. The president's agenda, in turn, was inspired by advocates and legislators, mayors and police chiefs, who have been working quietly in the wilderness for years.

Told over and over again that members of both parties were forever destined to do the National Rifle Association's bidding, these supporters of thoroughly moderate and reasonable weapons measures never gave up and never surrendered. Their time has come.

Behind the miracle, of course, lies the profound tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School and the loss of "26 beautiful lives," as Lynn McDonnell, mother of 7-year-old Grace McDonnell, one of those beautiful lives, put it at a conference in Connecticut last week.

But sad as it is to say, many other lives had been lost before in mass shootings and Congress and the president just went about their business. Why was Newtown the last straw?

There was, above all, the sheer

horror of all those children killed. You sensed that something snapped that day in the minds of millions of Americans. At that moment, they were done with powerlessness and inertia.

The change in the president's political situation mattered, too. Unfortunately, he had been unwilling before the 2012 election to speak out boldly on guns. The Newtown killings galvanized him.

The fact that he and Biden have refused to let the issue fade away has also made a difference. Once it became clear that neither they nor anyone else on the side of gun sanity would be intimidated by the NRA, the bullies were revealed for what they are and their punch was shown to be far less formidable than their threats.

Suddenly, Americans in large numbers (and the media, too) started noticing how extreme, even wacky, the rhetoric of the gun manufacturers' lobby has become. Their talk about representing the "real America" was exposed as a fraud: "Real" Americans don't resist pragmatic solutions to the problems of mass violence.

Oh, yes, and it was also finally noticed that a majority of Americans doesn't own guns, that gun ownership has dropped over time, and that this real majority does not want to be forced to live in a world in which everyone is terrorized into buying a weapon.

The hollowness of the arm-everyone crowd's "arguments" has been laid out for all to see. Why, pray, would law-abiding gun